

its prospects seemed hopeless. Unless, indeed, there was some member of the Imperial Family upon whom paganism rested its hopes and to whom it looked as its future deliverer! Was Crispus such a prince? Again we do not know. There is not a scrap of evidence to bear out a theory which has only been framed as a possible explanation of the dark mystery of his fate.

Eutropius, whose character sketches, for all their brevity, usually tally well with known facts, calls Crispus a prince of the highest merit (*virum egregium*). Why then did Constantine turn against him? We may, perhaps, see the first sign of the changed relationship in the fact that in 323 the Caesarship of Gaul was taken from Crispus and given to the young Constantius, then a child of seven. So far as is known, no compensating title or command was offered in exchange, which looks as though Constantine was disinclined to trust his eldest son any longer and preferred to keep him in surveillance by his side. The father may have been jealous of the prowess and popularity of the son; the son may have been ambitious, as Constantine himself had been in his young days, and have deemed that his services merited elevation to the rank of an Augustus. According to the system of Diocletian, twenty years of sovereignty were held to be long enough for the welfare alike of sovereign and of the Empire, Constantine's term was running out. The system was not yet formally abandoned; is it unreasonable to suppose that Crispus considered he had claims to rule, or that Constantine, resolved to keep what he